DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 078 SP 035 215

AUTHOR Jensen, Rita A.; Shepston, Therese J.
TITLE Combining Professional Development Plans and Portfolios for Use in Preservice Teacher Education: Early Childhood and Elementary Education Perspectives.
PUB DATE Feb 94
NOTE 21p.; Appendices A-D, referenced on page 8, are not included.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; Education Courses; Education Majors; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; Methods Courses; *Portfolios (Background Materials); Preservice Teacher Education; Professional Development; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Educational Objectives; *Student Evaluation; Teacher Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Preservice Teachers; *Teacher Development

ABSTRACT

The main objectives of this study were to combine professional development plans and portfolios for use in undergraduate teacher education courses and to assess the effectiveness of this practice in two independent but related efforts. Participants in this study included 70 preservice teachers who were enrolled in either a 300 level early childhood education course or a 200 level teaching strategies course. Results suggest that professional development plans and portfolios can be combined successfully and utilized effectively in teacher preparation--at least in the particular contexts of this study. The majority of the portfolios which students developed to document achievement of their self-selected goals included relevant supporting materials, accurate assessments of their work, and clearly articulated reflections regarding their progress and growth. Student comments revealed that they found the experience of developing professional development plans and completing portfolios beneficial. In addition, the instructors observed that the combination of these two concepts provided teacher education students with a point of focus for their professional development, as well as with a method for documenting achievement in the areas designated by their goals. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 374 078

Combining Professional Development Plans and Portfolios for Use in Preservice Teacher Education: Early Childhood and Elementary Education Perspectives

Dr. Rita A. Jensen
Assistant Professor
Bradley University
208 Westlake Hall
Peoria, IL 61625
(309) 677-3191

Dr. Therese J. Shepston
Assistant Professor
Bradley University
213 Westlake Hall
Peoria, IL 61625
(309) 677-3201

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R Jensen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Running head: PDPs and Portfolios

SP035215

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ABSTRACT

The main objectives of this study were to combine professional development plans and portfolios for use in undergraduate teacher education courses and to assess the effectiveness of this practice in two independent but related efforts. Participants in this study included 70 preservice teachers who were enrolled in either a 300 level early childhood education course or a 200 level teaching strategies course.

Results suggest that professional development plans and portfolios can be combined successfully and utilized effectively in teacher preparation--at least in the particular contexts of this study. The majority of the portfolios which students developed to document achievement of their self-selected goals included relevant supporting materials, accurate assessments of their work, and clearly articulated reflections regarding their progress and growth.

Student comments revealed that they found the experience of developing professional development plans and completing portfolios beneficial. In addition, the instructors observed that the combination of these two concepts provided teacher education students with a point of focus for their professional development, as well as with a method for documenting achievement in the areas designated by their goals.

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

In their past attempts to utilize portfolios in undergraduate teacher education courses, the authors discovered that many students experienced some difficulty and frustration in the process of developing portfolios to document their growth and progress. Once convinced that their portfolios needed to be more than idea files or collections of materials, students seemed to lack a sense of direction and were unable to focus their efforts.

Purpose of the Study

Consequently, the authors sought methods to enhance the effectiveness of preservice teachers' use of portfolios. One result of their exploration was the notion of combining the use of professional development plans (PDPs) and portfolios in undergraduate teacher preparation. The PDP, with its emphasis on a self-selected goal, can provide a means of defining the intended outcome of a portfolio. The following pages describe the process and outcome of two teacher educators' experiences of implementing the combined use of PDPs and portfolios within the context of teacher education courses.

Theoretical Framework

The literature and research relating to the use of portfolios has expanded greatly in recent years (e.g., Gomez, Graue, & Block, 1991; Hiebert & Hutchison, 1991; Lamme & Hysmith, 1991; Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). Linked with authentic assessment and performance

assessment, the term *portfolios* has become a buzz word for educators. Those involved in teacher education also have begun to explore the use of portfolios, as evidenced by the increase in the numbers of presentations and research articles related to the issue (e.g., Ohlhausen, & Ford, 1990; Mosenthal, 1993; Stone, 1993).

While the literature is overwhelmingly supportive of the portfolio concept, the mechanics of how best to implement and organize the portfolio as an assessment tool in higher education continues to surface as a major question. In addition, student and faculty attitudes regarding the use of portfolios are definitely mixed. The reality of utilizing a process portfolio as an assessment tool carries with it an element of risk and ambiguity that may not be comfortable for either professors or students. Gomez, Graue, and Bloch (1991) state that "portfolios are portrayed as solutions to many problems" (p. 627) and remind educators that there are many tensions inherent in portfolio usage. On the other hand, according to Mathies and Uphoff (1992), "the active learning mirrored in a teacher education program portfolio can serve as a catalyst for students and faculty to become aware of and in control of their thinking, commitment, attitudes, and attention" (p. 8).

The promise of portfolio assessment appears to lie in the collaborative power that is fueled by the development and reflection inherent in the portfolio process. Both students and faculty members must come together to risk growing and challenging each others' thinking. It seems that this premise is as valid and appropriate for

higher education as it is for K-12 classrooms. Bullough predicts that "reflectivity as a guiding ideal for program development is rapidly on its way to enjoying unprecedented status among teacher educators" (1989, p. 15). Additional research is needed, however, to determine the relationship between reflectivity and tradtional teacher assessment methodologies (McCarther, et al., 1992).

According to Barton and Collins (1992), there are three essential components to a teacher education portfolio. First, teacher educators must identify essential knowledge that is important for students to learn in specific fields of study. Second, teacher educators must establish, along with their students, usable ways to display this essential knowledge. Third, teacher educators must link what is taught within and across courses to a program theme. When tying these three components together, Barton and Collins report the development of a strong relationship between teaching, learning, reflection, and assessment.

If teacher educators are serious about their mission of assisting preservice teachers in becoming the educational leaders and decision-makers of tomorrow, the importance of modeling desirable assessment practices seems eminent. Routman (1991), in a publication geared to an audience of K-12 teachers, stated that "a portfolio approach to evaluation assumes knowledgeable teachers who understand and integrate....learning processes in their teaching and who are ready to give up some control and entrust ownership of the learning-evaluation

process to students" (p. 330). In addition to Routman, many researchers support the notion that assessment drives educational practice (Winograd, Paris, & Bridge, 1991; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

It is essential then, that preservice teachers experience the most appropriate and meaningful assessment possible in their teacher education programs. Reflective portfolios seem to bring together the artifacts of teaching with the reflective process to give assessment a meaningful context. "Ultimately, teachers should place both actual artifacts of the teaching and learning process, as well as reflective statements on the meaning of these classroom activities and products, in their portfolios" (Ohio Consortium for Portfolio Development, 1992, p. 10). Reflection, as advocated by the Ohio Consortium, is a key to this process. Killion and Todham (1991) identified three major distinctions in the reflective process: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action. Wellington (1991), who also agreed with the need to define and develop the reflective process, framed the following reflective questions: "What did I do? What does this mean? How did I come to be this way? How might I do things differently? What have I learned?" (p. 11). According to Wellington, a reflective, exploring teacher nurtures reflective, exploring students.

Although little effort has been made to draw or force connections between portfolio use and professional development plans, the authors of this paper tied the development of responses to reflective questions to the process of portfolio development in their teacher education classes.

The professional development plan outline consists of questions somewhat similar to Wellington's reflective questions. These questions served to focus the students' development of goals, as well as the reflective dimensions outlined by Killion and Todham (1991): reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action. Consequently, once students completed their PDPs, their portfolio efforts were guided by the goals they set for themselves. Such an approach evolved from the authors' deliberate attempts to draw connections between professional development plans and portfolios within the context of teacher education.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Participants in this study were enrolled in one of two undergraduate teacher education courses. One group consisted of students enrolled in a 300 level early childhood education course entitled "Primary Methods." Of these 18 students, all are female, 5 are non-traditional, and two are minorities. The second group consisted of special education majors and elementary education majors enrolled in one of two sections of a 200 level course entitled "Effective Teaching Strategies." The two sections combined included 49 females, 3 males, 16 non-traditional students, and 5 minority students, for a total of 52 students. In all, 70 preservice teachers, almost all of whom were sophomores or juniors at the time the research was conducted, served as study participants.

Materials

Instructor developed and/or adapted materials were utilized to introduce the concept of process portfolios and professional development plans. One such hand-out described the portfolio assignment, while another listed the five questions professional development plans were to address. A third hand-out identified characteristics of effective goals, and a fourth outlined assessment criteria. These forms are included as Appendices A, B, C, and D.

In addition, all students were asked to read Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer's (1991) "What Makes a Portfolio a Portfolio?." This article served as the foundation for an introductory discussion of portfolios.

Finally, study participants completed an informal evaluation of the combined professional development plan and portfolio project. This took the form of a PMI evaluation. Students delineated what they felt to be **plusses**, **minuses**, and **interesting** features of the project.

Procedures

The main objectives of this study were to combine professional development plans and portfolios for use in undergraduate teacher education courses and to assess the effectiveness of this practice in two independent but related efforts. As a part of their course requirements, undergraduate teacher education students were asked to identify goals to work on throughout the semester. They were given a great deal of latitude and ownership in selecting their goals. The only criterion that was imposed upon them was that their goals must somehow relate to

their preparation as teachers. Students were encouraged to choose goals that were of personal interest to them, whether the goals involved education issues they wished to learn more about or skills they wished to enhance.

Once the students could articulate a general direction or focus for their goals, they formulated professional development plans that were structured around the following five basic questions: (1) What do I want to do?; (2) Why do I want to do it?; (3) How will I do it?; (4) What do I need to do it?; and (5) How will I know I've done it? After the professional development plans were written, students read about and discussed: portfolios, components of portfolios, and the different types of portfolios. Then, drawing from their responses to the question, "How will I know I've done it?", students compiled lists of possible ways to document progress toward their particular goals.

The portfolios that the students developed included:

1. Tables of contents or some alternative form of "road map" for directing the reader through the portfolios.
2. Their professional development plans.
3. Relevant and appropriate documentation of their progress and growth in the direction of their stated goals.
4. Their rationales for the inclusion in the portfolio of every piece of documentation present.
5. Their reflections regarding each piece of documentation included in the portfolios.

6. Their assessments of the degree to which they felt they reached their goals.
7. Summaries or conclusions in which they commented on the experience of completing this combined professional development plan and portfolio assignment.

Data Analyses

At the conclusion of the semester, students presented brief oral summaries of their combined professional development plan and portfolio assignments. In doing so, they were encouraged to share both the "good news" and the "bad news," as well as descriptions of the methods they used to document progress toward the goals they identified in their professional development plans.

In addition, students completed a PMI evaluation that asked them to reflect on the combined professional development plan and portfolio assignment, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and offer suggestions for improving the experience. The PMI evaluation input, student professional development plans, student portfolios, and instructor observations all were utilized in drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the combined use of professional development plans and portfolios in these particular teacher education courses and in generating ideas for improving the effectiveness of this practice in subsequent semesters.

RESULTS

In the following pages, the results of the study are presented. Both process and product are featured as students' professional development plans and portfolios are described. Students' perceptions of the experience also focus on process as well as product, as do the instructors' observations of the combined professional development plan and portfolio assignment.

Professional Development Plans

Among the topics addressed by students' self-selected goals were organizational and study skills, creative teaching strategies, adolescent development, multicultural education, emergent literacy, math anxiety, instructional management, literature files, job seeking skills, and attention deficit disorders. Having responded to the first (What do I want to do?) of the five questions which were used to focus the students' thinking, by attempting to formulate goals which featured observable behavior, specified conditions, and identified performance criteria, students explored the reasons they selected their particular goal areas (Why do I want to do it?). They then outlined the procedures they intended to use to meet their goals (How am I going to do it?) and the skills or materials they thought they would need to meet their goals (What do I need to do it?). Finally, students described the evidence they would provide to document their progress toward their self-selected goals (How will I know I've done it?).

Approximately half of the students wrote PDPs which were approved by their instructors upon the initial submission. Other PDPs required a second or third revision before they contained the clarity and specificity the instructors thought were necessary for the students' success. The questions which students tended to find most difficult to answer were, "What do I want to do?" and "How will I know I've done it?". Such a result seems logical when one considers the natural link between setting objectives and assessing those same objectives. Consequently, students who had difficulty articulating goals which were specific, attainable, and measurable also tended to have difficulty deciding how they would determine if they achieved their goals. (If you don't know where you're going, you probably won't know when you get there.)

Portfolios

The majority of the 70 portfolios which students produced were logically organized attempts to demonstrate progress toward their self-selected goals. With only a few exceptions, students' portfolios included tables of contents, their professional development plans, relevant and appropriate documentation, captions identifying each piece of evidence and the rationale for its inclusion, their assessments of their portfolios and of their progress toward their goals, and summaries in which they reflected upon the experience of completing the combined professional development plan and portfolio assignment.

However, even though almost all portfolios contained all of the above elements, approximately 10% of the portfolios, while they did include relevant and appropriate documentation, did not contain convincing documentation or sufficient documentation to demonstrate achievement of the identified goals. These particular portfolios could be characterized as lacking authenticity or as failing to reflect sustained and genuine effort in the direction of students' self-selected goals. In their written summaries and oral presentations, some students acknowledged the limited documentation to be found in their portfolios, either attributing it to insufficient time, goals they found difficult to document, or their own lack of follow-through.

PMI Evaluation

At the conclusion of the semester, students were asked to evaluate the PDP and portfolio experience, without identifying themselves. The specific prompt they were asked to address was: "Reflecting on writing a professional development plan (PDP) and creating a portfolio to document your growth in the direction of the goal you set for yourself, complete a PMI chart by listing the positive, negative, and interesting aspects of your PDP and portfolio experience. Please focus on both process and outcomes."

Such an open-ended format produced a variety of responses which the authors analyzed for the purpose of identifying patterns and common themes. Among the first patterns to emerge were a strong consensus among respondents regarding the positive features of the

combined professional development plan and portfolio assignment and a greater range of responses regarding the negative features of the experience.

The majority of students' positive statements dealt with one of three processes: formulating self-selected goals; reflecting on their individual strengths, weaknesses, and progress; and expanding their skills and/or knowledge base in relation to their goals. Representative of the aspects students listed as positive are the following:

* "Allowed me to see my own improvement."
* "Final product....something to be proud of."
* "I formed a new positive habit--set a pattern for myself."
* "It made me realize that I don't have to just accept my weaknesses--that I can change them."
* "Satisfaction of achieving a pre-set goal."
* "Decision making skills were strengthened."
* "The degree of independence and creativity involved in forming the portfolio."
* "A means of taking responsibility for my learning and development."

While students' negative statements did not lend themselves to grouping, a few themes emerged, although not with as clear of a consensus as the three categories of positive statements. Many students indicated a desire for more direction and guidance in the process of creating PDPs and portfolios. Some commented on the time and effort

the process entailed; others found it difficult to narrow their goals, set realistic expectations, execute their goals, or document progress toward their goals; and a smattering of comments focused on the perennial question of grading. Illustrative of the aspects students listed as negative are the following.

* "Some topics need more evidence or don't lend themselves to evidence collection as easily."
* "Might have set my goal too low and wasn't challenging myself enough."
* "Takes much more effort--this could be positive, depending on which side you are looking at."
* "Time consuming."
* "Difficult to focus or pick one specific goal that would be measurable."
* "Making my own self-evaluation and assessment was the most difficult for me."
* "Don't feel I spent enough time on it. Since it was due at the end, it was the last task to be touched."
* I needed more guidance as to how it was to be done."

An analysis of the comments students placed in the "Interesting" column revealed that the content of most of those entries was, in fact, positive. For example, many students stated that they enjoyed hearing the goals their peers had selected and that they learned a great deal from the oral portfolio presentations all students made at the end of the

semester. Others commented that they learned more about themselves, expanded their knowledge base, and found the instructors' modelling of the process of portfolio assessment helpful. Among the aspects of the combined PDP and portfolio assignment which students identified as interesting are the following.

* "Something I want to continue to learn about."
* "I acquired a favorite author. This was something I did not plan on."
* "Required me to look at my past, present, and future education."
* "Opportunity to finally be graded on my 'work,' not just memorization or 'plug and chug' like in other methods."
* "I really enjoyed working on this because it gave me a chance to improve upon some aspect of teaching."
* "I think portfolios would be good to implement in the schools. Portfolios would be something fun for the children, and they would learn a lot in the process."
* "It was definitely interesting to see all the different goals people chose to meet."
* "Variety of materials and resources used to meet goals."

Instructor Observations

Comparing the combined use of professional development plans and portfolios to the use of portfolios apart from professional development plans, the instructors found students' final products to be more focused, more complete, and more detailed when led by PDPs.

However, students definitely struggled with the process of formulating professional development plans. They experienced particular difficulty with identifying specific, attainable, and measurable goals to set a direction for their portfolio efforts and with determining how to document their growth.

Students who bought into the notion of portfolio assessment and brought to the experience their genuine interest and sincere efforts met with success. The fact that most students found the process challenging and at times arduous was expected, given their lack of prior experience with both professional development plans and portfolio assessment. The fact that the majority of students found the process rewarding and the products worthwhile indicates the powerful motivation that can result from involving students in their own learning and allowing them to direct their own learning. Such ownership tends to create opportunities for students to demonstrate self-responsibility, decision making, and independence.

The instructors acknowledge that some students could have benefitted from more guidance. Although students were encouraged to make appointments with their instructors if they wished to discuss their PDPs or portfolios, perhaps those who were most in need of assistance were also those least likely to seek it on their own time and of their own initiative.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Results from both the early childhood and elementary courses indicate that professional development plans and portfolios can be combined successfully and utilized effectively in teacher preparation--at least in the particular contexts of this study. The majority of the portfolios which students developed to document achievement of their stated goals included relevant supporting materials, accurate assessments of their work, and clearly articulated reflections regarding their progress and growth. In addition, student comments revealed that they found the experience of developing professional development plans and completing portfolios beneficial.

Educational Significance

The results of this study support the combined use of professional development plans and portfolios in preservice teacher preparation. The combination of these two concepts provides teacher education students with a point of focus for their professional development, as well as with a method for documenting growth and progress in the area designated by the focus.

The utilization of this combination also provides for a high degree of individualization in preservice teacher education by allowing undergraduates to identify goals for their continued professional development and areas of personal interest for further exploration. As such, the authors view the combined use of professional development

plans and portfolios as a viable practice for teacher educators to explore, as it seems to hold the potential for assisting preservice teachers in their preparation.

Recommendations for Further Study

Both student comments and instructor observations suggest a next obvious step in terms of further study of the combined use of professional development plans and portfolios in preservice teacher education. An approach that features more checkpoints along the way could be implemented. These checkpoints could take the form of individual conferences between students and instructors, peer conferences, and/or brief in-class responses to questions such as, "How are you doing?"; "What are you doing right now?"; or "What do you need to do next?". In addition, students with similar interests and goals could be grouped together to provide a support network.

Another possibility for further study is utilizing a combination of professional development plans and portfolios at different points in the teacher preparation process. It is likely that both the results and the process would be much different at the freshman level, as opposed to the senior level.

Finally, it might be both interesting and informative to provide preservice teachers with a second, or even a third, experience with professional development plans and portfolios and track their development in terms of variables such as ease of implementation, sophistication of their goals, refinement of the process, and degree of

self-direction. Equally important to analyze would be similarities and differences in students' perceptions of the first, second, or third experiences with the combined use of PDPs and portfolios.